

VZCZCXRO6628
OO RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH
DE RUEHKL #0836/01 2950520
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 220520Z OCT 09
FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3281
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 2641
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0109
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2680
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUALA LUMPUR 000836

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/22/2019
TAGS: [OVIP](#) [STEINBERG](#) [JAMES](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MY](#)
SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY STEINBERG'S SEPTEMBER 28, 2009
MEETING WITH MALAYSIAN DEFENSE MINISTER HAMIDI

Classified By: Ambassador James R. Keith for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) September 28, 2009; 10:00 a.m.; The Ministry of
Defense; Kuala Lumpur.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Participants:

U.S.

The Deputy Secretary
Ambassador Keith
Ambassador Joseph DeTrani, Directorate of National
Intelligence
Joseph Donovan, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State
Scot Marciel, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, EAP
Derek Mitchell, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of
Defense
Rear Admiral Charles Leidig, Joint Chiefs of Staff
Pamela Park, Special Assistant to the Deputy Secretary
Col. Y.T. Pak, Defense Attache
Greg Chapman, Political Officer, U.S. Embassy Kuala Lumpur
(notetaker)

MALAYSIA

Minister of Defense Ahmad Zahid Hamidi
Chief of Defense Offices General Azizan bin Ariffin
MoD Secretary-General Abu Bakar bin Haj Abdulla
Under Secretary for Policy Dr. Hj Ismail bin Hj Ahmad
Director of the Defense Intelligence Staff Division LTG Abdul
Hadi bin Hussin
Deborah Tan, North America desk officer, Ministry of Foreign
Affairs (notetaker)

[1](#)3. (C) SUMMARY: In a September 28 meeting with visiting
Deputy Secretary Steinberg, Malaysian Defense Minister Ahmad
Zahid Hamidi stressed the "new tone" of relations between the
U.S. and Malaysia, with Prime Minister Najib encouraging
closer cooperation with the U.S. on all fronts, including
mil-to-mil. Hamidi shared Deputy Steinberg's assessment
that relations between the two defense establishments are
excellent, and improving, as seen in increased port visits
and Malaysian participation in U.S. training exercises.
Recalling his conversation with PM Najib earlier in the day,
Deputy Secretary Steinberg urged Hamidi to firm up notional
ideas about Malaysian mil-mil assistance to Afghanistan.
Deputy Steinberg suggested other areas where the two
countries can work together, including anti-piracy and
peace-keeping operations. Hamidi told the Deputy the cabinet
had agreed to waive port fees for visiting U.S. Navy ships
(although the government decision still had to be worked out
with port owners and operators), and he would be visiting the
U.S. early next year to meet with Defense Secretary Gates.
He encouraged a U.S. ship visit to Langkawi Island in
December for the International Maritime and Aerospace
Exhibition, as a way of underscoring strengthened ties. END

SUMMARY.

14. (C) Defense Minister Hamidi, who took office in April of this year, fully agreed with Deputy Secretary Steinberg's assessment that our bilateral relations on the defense side are excellent, and growing. Hamidi pointed out that Malaysia had recently upgraded the rank of its Ambassador in Washington to full ministerial-level. He said PM Najib had instructed his government to look for ways to improve relations with the US, especially in mil-to-mil. Hamidi thought Deputy Steinberg's visit was timely, taking place as the government sought to implement this shift.

15. (C) Hamidi and Deputy Secretary Steinberg reviewed recent progress in defense cooperation: the U.S. Navy had increased the number of its ship visits to Malaysia, Malaysians were sending more military personnel on US-sponsored training events, and the two militaries participated in a growing list of joint exercises. PDAS/D Mitchell singled out the August Malaysian-U.S. Strategic Talks (MUSST) event as another indicator of the excellent tone of relations, and added that Defense Secretary Gates had commented on the importance of getting the U.S. military more engaged in Southeast Asia. LTG Hadi offered another indicator of mil-to-mil ties -- the ongoing construction of a series of radar installations in eastern Sabah, paid for with USG 1206 funding. Deputy Steinberg and Minister Hamidi agreed that defense cooperation between the U.S. and Malaysia, as well as among the countries in the region, was vital to long-term stability. The Minister also noted that regional collaboration was good: Malaysia was working closely with the Thai, Indonesians and Singaporeans on counter-piracy, and ASEAN defense ministers worked well

KUALA LUMP 00000836 002 OF 002

together through the various US-ASEAN defense fora. Hamidi agreed with Deputy Steinberg that ASEAN 1 could be used to build defense ties in an informal setting.

16. (C) On USN ship visits to Malaysia, Minister Hamidi said his government understood that high port fees had become something of an obstacle to U.S. Navy calls to commercial Malaysian ports, and to resolve the issue the cabinet had recently decided to waive port fees for U.S. Navy ships. The issue wasn't completely resolved, since Malaysian ports were privatized and the fee waiver had not yet been negotiated with port owners and operators. MoD Secretary-General Abu Bakar raised the issue of clearing ports of civilian merchant traffic when U.S. Navy ships were in town to provide better security.

17. (C) Deputy Steinberg said there were other areas where we can work more closely: peacekeeping operations, anti-piracy and assistance to Afghanistan. The Deputy indicated he was aware that Malaysia had offered some capacity building training in Malaysia to Afghans, and described his discussion of Afghanistan with PM Najib earlier that morning (see septel). Hamidi told Deputy Steinberg his government wanted to enhance its efforts with Afghanistan, and was considering various options. One possibility, he said, playing on Malaysia's experience with de-radicalization, was a program aimed at "cooling down" anti-western sentiments among some Afghans. This program was very notional at this point, but reflected the GoM's willingness to do more, he said.

18. (C) Minister Hamidi encouraged U.S. Navy participation in Malaysia's upcoming International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition, to be held on Langkawi Island in December. Hamidi hoped the U.S. could send a naval ship to make a port call during the event as a way of emphasizing the partnership of the two countries in the area of defense, and suggested that in the future the US consider building in joint exercises as part of events of this sort. Admiral Leidig said a ship visit was already under consideration. As a former Minister of Tourism, Hamidi also hoped that more U.S. military personnel would come to Malaysia for tourism in order to help build understanding between the two countries. He pointed out

how Middle Eastern attitudes toward Malaysia had improved greatly since Malaysia began promoting itself as a destination for persons from that part of the world.

¶9. (C) Minister Hamidi indicated he would likely be traveling to the U.S. in February or March next year. Hamidi said he wanted to enhance our bilateral dialogue through what he called a "personal touch." Deputy Steinberg agreed the personal touch was important in bilateral relations, and offered the ASEAN plus one forum as a venue where those personal ties could be built. He encouraged Hamidi to make a call at the State Department when he visits Washington.

¶10. (U) Deputy Secretary Steinberg cleared this message.
KEITH